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# News Release



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## Service Issues Permit for New Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that it has approved a Habitat Conservation Plan and related environmental documents that allow for planned urban development and conservation of habitat for nearly two-dozen protected species in the 53,537-acre Natomas Basin area of Sacramento and Sutter counties.

The Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan details comprehensive strategies to protect wildlife, including the preservation and restoration of habitat that will be held and managed in perpetuity by the Natomas Basin Conservancy. As part of the conservation plan, the Service has granted permits to the City of Sacramento, Sutter County and the Natomas Basin Conservancy for the “incidental take” of 22 threatened, endangered or special-status species resulting from development, farm activities, and habitat restoration and management in the Natomas Basin.

The Endangered Species Act defines “take” as the killing, harming or harassment of a listed species, or the destruction of its habitat. An HCP allows a limited take of listed plants and animals in return for conservation strategies, including the preservation and management of a specified amount of habitat for affected species.

A federal court in August 2000 faulted the Service for, among other things, not preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for the original Natomas Basin HCP, adopted in December 1997. Over the last three years, the Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the City of Sacramento and Sutter County prepared the revised Habitat Conservation Plan and environmental documents to correct this matter, satisfy the court, and include Sutter County, which was not a partner in the earlier HCP.

“The Service is pleased to approve this HCP, and we commend all the parties for working together for years to craft this plan,” said Wayne White, field supervisor of the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office. “We believe the document provides a good framework for protecting the covered species and addresses all the issues raised by the court case.”

Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo said the Natomas Basin Conservancy already manages more than 2,000 acres of habitat in the Basin, and more habitat lands will be acquired as the Basin develops.

“I have always felt that providing for open space around our city is a good thing,” she said. “Open space is good for wildlife, and good for our residents.”

Federally-listed species covered by the Natomas Basin HCP are the threatened giant garter snake, the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, the vernal pool fairy shrimp, Colusa grass and slender Orcutt grass, and the endangered vernal pool tadpole shrimp and Sacramento Orcutt grass.

The HCP area comprises the entire 53,537-acre Natomas Basin within both Sacramento and Sutter counties. Under the HCP, developers will be allowed to construct projects in defined areas of the Natomas Basin totaling 15,517 acres. In return, each developer must comply with avoidance and mitigation measures and pay a fee adequate to cover the costs of acquiring, restoring and managing one-half acre of habitat for every acre of land developed. Habitat lands would be acquired and managed by the Natomas Basin Conservancy, a non-profit conservation organization, with funding provided by developers.

Among the documents the Service approved late Friday were a final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision under the National Environmental Policy Act, an agreement between the Service and the other agencies to carry out the conservation plan, and incidental take permits under the Endangered Species Act.

With the completion of these federal documents, the California Department of Fish and Game is expected to act on its issuance of State Endangered Species Act permits for the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan area.

A CD or printed copy of the Final HCP and Environmental Impact Statement is available by calling the City of Sacramento Planning Department at 916/264-5381.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies